

June 7 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

achievement produced by the new tone in Washington, and it was produced in record time.

Tax relief is an achievement for families struggling to enter the middle class. For hard-working lower income families, we have cut the bottom rate of Federal income tax from 15 percent to 10 percent. We doubled the per-child tax credit to \$1,000 and made it refundable. Tax relief is compassionate, and it is now on the way.

Tax relief is an achievement for middle class families squeezed by high energy prices and credit card debt. Most families can look forward to a \$600 tax rebate before they have to pay the September back-to-school bills. And in the years ahead, taxpayers can look forward to steadily declining income tax rates.

Tax relief is an achievement for families that want the Government tax policy to be fair and not penalize them for making good choices, good choices such as marriage and raising a family. So we cut the marriage penalty.

Tax relief makes the code more fair for small businesses and farmers and individuals by eliminating the death tax. Over the long haul, tax relief will encourage work and innovation. It will allow American workers to save more on their pension plan or individual retirement accounts.

Tax relief expands individual freedom. The money we return, or don't take in the first place, can be saved for a child's education, spent on family needs, invested in a home or in a business or a mutual fund or used to reduce personal debt.

The message we send today: It's up to the American people; it's the American people's choice. We recognize, loud and clear, the surplus is not the Government's money. The surplus is the people's money, and we ought to trust them with their own money.

This tax relief plan is principled. We cut taxes for every income-tax payer. We target nobody in; we target nobody out. And tax relief is now on the way.

Today is a great day for America. It is the first major achievement of a new era, an era of steady cooperation. And more achievements are ahead. I thank the Members of Congress in both parties who made today possible. Together, we will lead our country to new progress and new possibilities.

It is now my honor to sign the first broad tax relief in a generation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:58 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. H.R. 1836, approved June 7, was assigned Public Law No. 107-16.

Remarks to the Fourth National Summit on Fatherhood

June 7, 2001

Thank you all very much for that warm welcome. It's an honor to be introduced by Tommy Thompson, who not only was an outstanding Governor but, I can assure you, is going to be an outstanding Secretary of Health and Human Services. He is bright, capable, smart, and does everything the President tells him. *[Laughter]* He's my buddy. But thank you, Tommy, very much.

I am so honored Members of the United States Congress are here. I appreciate you all being here, Senator Carper, Senator Bayh, Congressman J.C. Watts. If there are other Members of the Congress here, thank you all for coming, as well. Roland Warren, it's good to meet you, sir. I appreciate your focus and effort. I've got something to say about the other two characters up here in a minute. *[Laughter]*

For 7 years, the National Fatherhood Initiative has been a powerful voice for responsible fatherhood. And for those of you involved, on behalf of our Nation, I say thanks from the bottom of our collective hearts. You have generated grassroots support and important national awareness. You've encouraged public officials like me to think and act on this incredibly important issue.

I worked with many of you on the Texas Fatherhood Initiative. We created a statewide public awareness campaign, mobilized community and corporate leadership, established a Texas Fatherhood Resource Center, and lent support to grassroots organizations all across our great State.

Promoting fatherhood was a commitment I made as Governor; it's a commitment I make as President; and it's a commitment I have made every day since our little girls were born in Dallas, Texas.

Two people who have been a central part of the National Fatherhood Initiative are now a valuable part of my administration, the Deputy Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Don Eberly, and the Acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services—and, we hope, a man confirmed soon—Wade Horn. [Applause] I was pleased to see Senator Carper leading the applause. [Laughter] Thank you guys for your service, and thank you for your willingness to work on behalf of the American people.

The intellectual roots of the fatherhood movement reach back to one exceptional public servant who spoke about the importance of fathers earlier, more often, and more eloquently than any other public figure, former United States Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York. Now, the fatherhood movement counts amongst its supporters a variety of public officials: Republicans Tom Ridge and Secretary of State Colin Powell, great Democrats like Al Gore and Joe Lieberman.

Most States now have initiatives that promote responsible fatherhood, and more

than 50 mayors are involved in the National Fatherhood Initiative's bipartisan Mayors Task Force on Fatherhood Promotion. The fatherhood movement is diverse, but it is united by one belief: Fathers have a unique and irreplaceable role in the lives of children.

For our children and for our Nation, nothing is more important than this initiative. Nearly every man who has a child wants to be a good father; I truly believe that. It's a natural longing of the human heart to care for and cherish your child, but this longing must find concrete expression.

Raising a child requires sacrifice, effort, time, and presence. And there is a wide gap between our best intentions and the reality of today's society. More than one-third of American children are living apart from their biological fathers. Of these, five out of six do not see their fathers more than once a week. And 40 percent of the children who live in fatherless households have not seen their fathers in at least a year. Some fathers are forced away by circumstances beyond their control, but many times when a couple with children splits up, the father moves away or simply drifts away.

We know that children who grow up with absent fathers can suffer lasting damage. They are more likely to end up in poverty or drop out of school, become addicted to drugs, have a child out of wedlock, or end up in prison. Fatherlessness is not the only cause of these things, but our Nation must recognize it is an important factor.

There is a familiar litany, but behind every statistic is a child, and a compassionate society can never forget the large place a father occupies in that child's life. Children look to their fathers to provide, even imperfectly, and nurture protection, provide discipline and care, guidance, and most importantly, unconditional love. Fathers are the object of a young child's admiration. They provide their sons and daughters with an example of what it means

to be a good man. And many of us believe a father's love, like a mother's love, even imperfectly, mirrors divine love.

The absence of a father can shatter a child's world. One 14-year-old girl put it this way: "My father left me when I learned to say 'daddy.' Even though my father is not around, in my heart he's always there. Every birthday, every Christmas, I cross my fingers in hopes that my father will come home. Does my wish come true? No. But I never quit looking and hoping."

When children quit looking and stop hoping, something terrible happened to them and to us. Over the past four decades, fatherlessness has emerged as one of our greatest social problems. Yet, during this period, we've also made some important social progress. Today, marriage is often a more equal partnership. Many fathers are more emotionally involved in the lives of their children. And our society now recognizes domestic violence for the violent crime it is. These trends are welcome and noble and overdue.

Many families with one parent do well. Single mothers do amazing work in difficult circumstances, succeeding at a job far harder than most of us can possibly imagine. They deserve our respect, and they deserve our support. And millions of children have strong, loving relationships with their non-resident dads. But on the whole, we must never forget children need their dads, and when they're absent, something is lost.

Fatherlessness has public consequences, so public officials have a role to play. My budget, for example, provides \$64 million in 2002 and \$315 million over 5 years for programs designed to strengthen fatherhood. We have proposed increased funding for promoting safe and stable families program and are taking steps to help make adoption more affordable. And we have tried to set an example by creating an atmosphere favorable to families in the White House, in the workplace, as should all of us who have responsibility for employees.

Democratic Senator Evan Bayh has taken the lead on fatherhood legislation in the last Congress and will do so again this year. And he deserves our gratitude. I look forward to working with him and Senator Domenici, as well as other key supporters of fatherhood legislation like Nancy Johnson, to secure passage this year of a bill that provides financial support to community based fatherhood programs all across the country.

I'm asking my Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to develop resource materials to guide urban congregations and other community groups in finding role models for young men who have been raised without fathers. And we will be working with the Office of National Drug Control Policy to enlist dads in our national campaign against drug use.

We have a responsibility to help children who have been born into harsh circumstances and fractured families. As a society, we must work to promote mentors—committed, caring adults in the lives of children.

I always like to say, I wish I knew the law that I could sign that would cause people to love one another. I'm confident these Senators, and I know this Member of the House, would sponsor it. I can assure you the President would sign it. But governments can't cause people to love one another. Love comes from the hearts and souls of citizens who want to help. And we must gather up the great compassion of our society, to encourage loving citizens to put their arm around a child who may not have a dad and say, "Somebody in this country loves you, and somebody cares for you."

There's no substitute for a dad. I recognize that. But there's sure a lot of hope when a child has a mentor. Just look at the record of Big Brothers and Big Sisters in America. They've had an incredible positive effect on the lives of children. Children who meet with a Big Brother and Big Sister

regularly for a year are 46 percent less likely than their peers to start using illegal drugs and 32 percent less likely to assault somebody. They are less likely to skip school and more likely to realize a dream.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America is an amazing story. And I want you all to hear this: There are estimates that more than 14 million children in this country could benefit from having a mentor. To begin addressing the need, my budget proposes a \$67 million initiative to mentor children whose parents are incarcerated. Our law should encourage responsible fatherhood; when children are abandoned, our society should encourage mentoring.

But ultimately, fatherhood is a deeply personal calling. Our own children are given to our care, and they depend on our love. Every parent knows that raising a child is among the most affirming experiences a human being will ever know. So many of my generation had the same—had this experience. When we held our children for the first time, we really found ourselves. We found a world of duty and love that changed our lives. And since that day—since that day, “dad” has been the most important title I have ever had. [*Applause*] Thank you very much. Thank you.

Children need a father’s love and attention, and they also need a loving family. To paraphrase my friend Josh McDowell, a child’s greatest source of security today is not only knowing my mom loves me and my dad loves me, but also that Mom and Dad love each other. If we are serious about renewing fatherhood, we must be serious about renewing marriage.

Ultimately, this, too, is a deeply personal calling. Renewing marriage depends on re-

newing the inward things of the heart, mutual respect and cooperation, support and affirmation, love and devotion. Healthy marriages are not always possible, but we must remember they are incredibly important for children. Our hearts know this, and our Nation must recognize this. “What greater thing is there for two human souls,” George Eliot wrote, “than to feel that they are joined for life to strengthen each other in all labor, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to be one with each other in silent, unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting.”

None of us is perfect, and so no marriage and no family is perfect. After all, we all are human. Yet, we need fathers and families precisely because we are human. We all live, it is said, in the shelter of one another. And our urgent hope is that—one of the oldest hopes of humanity—is this, to turn the hearts of children toward their parents and the hearts of parents toward their young. This is the hope of the Fatherhood Initiative. And because of your hard work, America will be a better place.

God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:15 p.m. in the Ticonderoga Room at the Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tom Ridge of Pennsylvania; Deputy Director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Don Eberly, chairman and founder, Acting Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services Wade F. Horn, president, and Roland Warren, executive vice president, National Fatherhood Initiative; Josh McDowell, founder, Josh McDowell Ministries; and former Vice President Al Gore.